

**January 31, 2022**

**Candidate Forum Between the Texas Senate District 15**

**Democratic Candidates, Sen. John Whitmire and Molly Cook**

**Hosted by SAAVETX, Bellaire Democrats and West U Democrats**

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**[The event is available on YouTube.](#)**

The transcript was done by an automatic service, and still contains some errors, weird capitalizations, and other typos and misspellings. Bellaire in particular seems to confuse the auto-transcriber - you'll see that all sorts of ways. I've tried to correct the most egregious errors, but those remaining are not left in to create confusion, but are there simply because I do not have time to correct them. The transcript has time stamps so you can forward to the appropriate point in the video if you are unsure of what was actually said.

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**Neha Madhani ([00:00:00](#)):**

Um, so as, as we must all know by now, uh, West U and ER are part of Senate district 15, we were part of Senate district 17. And so John Senator, John Whitmire is now our Senator. Um, we are new to him, but he is not new to the Senate. He's the Dean of the Senate and serving for about 38 years as chair of the criminal justice committee. And as I, um, I'm a clinical pharmacist for correctional managed care and we serve the healthcare needs for the entire, uh, state inmate population. So I can personally attest to all the, uh, one of attributes of Senator Whitmire. He's come to bat for us for healthcare funding. He's a true advocate for our patients and our patients, families. And so you have come, you have made a tremendous impact on the healthcare and lives of our, uh, inmate population. So I, I thank you for all the work that you have done, uh, in the last 30 plus years. Appreciate that.

**John Whitmire ([00:01:06](#)):**

Thank you.

**Neha Madhani ([00:01:07](#)):**

Thank You. And thank you for sitting down with us tonight, and then we have Molly Cook. Um, thank you for entering, uh, into the world of public service and as an ER nurse, you saw how bad policies into bad outcomes and decided to do something about it. And as a healthcare professional, I truly admire that. And I look forward to hearing more from you. And so, um, that's a brief intro, an introduction, uh, and we have a full house 99 participants. So let's started, I'm gonna give it over to Dana to go over some housekeeping and then, uh, SWAT will start us off.

**Dana ([00:01:49](#)):**

Hi, good evening, everyone. We're so glad you're joining us today. Um, because we have so many people who have chosen now to participate in this, what, uh, we need everyone to do is mute. Um, and, and then if you have questions, please put your questions into the chat room. We're gonna be giving the Senator and Ms. Cook 90 seconds, approximately for each question, for purposes of being able to answer, we will be bouncing these questions as well as follow ups that come up, but we are so grateful to you. Senator Whitmire. We're so grateful for you. Ms. Cook for purposes of participating tonight, and now I'm gonna toss this to SWA.

**Neha Madhani ([00:02:29](#)):**

Hi everyone. Um, good evening. It's good to be with all of you. Um, Senator Whitmire and Molly. I am going to ask you to tell us about your origin story, uh, um, why you got involved, um, and you know, what, what motivates you and both of you have about three minutes to tell your stories. Um, Molly, we'll let you go first.

**Molly Cook ([00:03:00](#)):**

Thank you so much to the South Asian American voter empowerment, Texas and west J, and Bellaire Dems for hosting this candidate forum tonight. I believe competitive primaries are important part of a component of a healthy party, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to engage in spirited discussion that can help us think through our goals, values, and strategies to shape the future of the democratic party in Harris county and across Texas. I am an organizer and I truly believe that grassroots orgs like the host tonight are who we have to thank for the progress we've seen and who will indeed save Texas. My name is Molly cook. I was born and raised in the Houston area. I'm a nurse and community organizer. I've been knocking on doors for a long time. I knocked doors and was an office captain in Montgomery county for Beto in 2018.

**Molly Cook ([00:03:44](#)):**

I was knocking doors along I 45 in 2020. When I met Elda, I spoke in broken Spanish and she spoke in broken English. And it wasn't until later when we had a translator present that she was able to thank me and tell me that she didn't know there was anything she could do to save her home from the I 45 expansion until I knocked on her door. Now I'm knocking on doors for a different reason. And I'm hearing from people like a woman in spring branch, who said her door has never been knocked on despite the incumbent being there in the legislature for nearly 50 years. My opponent tonight, like all of his mailers will talk about experience and that experience matters. And I agree experience does matter, but it begs the question. What kind of experience do you want your legislature to bring? Senator Whitmire has been in the legislature since he was 23.

**Molly Cook (00:04:29):**

I have experience of being a healthcare worker, making sacrifices to afford my healthcare renting my home and grassroots organizing Senator Whitmire is weighed down by experience decades of campaign contributions, backroom, deals and protecting personal political capital as a nurse and community organizer. I bring knowledge of the issues as well as embodied understanding of the challenges folks face. I value empathy, listening, community engagement, equity, bottom up planning and honesty. I'm not afraid to do what it takes to bring healing or to shape change. I'm an ER nurse, but I don't just work with democratic doctors and I don't just save democratic patients. Sometimes I have four minutes to earn someone's trust and possibly save their life. In my unpaid work, I build relationships across diverse groups to get things done, like stopping a freeway expansion. I have heard that the Senator was a reformer, but his choices more recently are enough to make me wonder what happened to Whitmire.

**Molly Cook (00:05:24):**

His way of doing things is no longer serving our district or our state. And I bring fresh perspective and public health and policy expertise. I would be the first woman ever in this seat. The Senator is running for Houston mayor saying I can't do this job with one foot in and one foot out. So why have one foot out? I'm focused and prepared to place the interest of the district above my own. And I've already forced to Senator, to campaign an increased voter engagement across the district. My name is Molly cook, and I'm ready to be your next state Senator.

**Neha Madhani (00:05:56):**

Thank you, Molly. Senator Whitmire

**John Whitmire (00:05:59):**

Meha. Thank you. And thank, uh, Ms. Cook. I believe public service is a calling. I think someday we're gonna be judged, but what we did while we were public servants and quite frankly, I think everyone just participating tonight is a public servant. Whether you're ever on the ballot or not, we all have the duty to make this world a better place. I was a 22 year old senior at U of H in 1972 and went by working my way through U of H like so many others went by a professor's office and he was looking at a redistricting map. I needed more time on a paper. And he asked me where I live. I showed him there were a new single member, district map being drawn. And I showed him Oak Forest. I went to Walter high school. I went to church there. My mother was a nurse at Memorial Northwest, and I made the comment.

**John Whitmire (00:06:47):**

It looked like they drew that one for me. So I went home and told my parents that evening, that I'd like to remain out of school that spring and run for the legislature. Now you talking about divine intervention. My father, mother should have said, you've got the rest of your life, get your degree. But instead my father said, you might as well. So I started knocking doors. People identified with me because I came out of their communities. So make a long story short that began a public service as an elected official. I spent 10 years in a house preparing to go to the Senate in 1983, served on numerous committees. And then in 83 was elevated to state Senate. It's a different challenge, much. I have, we have nearly a million people in the Senate district. So I served in the eighties. Under bill hobby was from Houston.

**John Whitmire (00:07:40):**

Then 91, I started chairing criminal justice. Criminal justice system was broken in the state of Texas. It was a revolving door. You served one month for every year that you were sentenced. We did no classification. We treated everyone. The same violent offenders were treated just like nonviolent. So I surrounded myself with smart people. We did an expansion program. We went into treatment mode, started classifying. I strongly believe that you only lock up people that you're afraid of. Not people that you're mad at people that you're mad at. You try to treat their alcohol drug addiction, their mental health, emotional condition, and try to make them a success. We've done that. We're a national model. I've been to the white house and discussed the reentry program that we've instituted in the state of Texas. We're a model now it's very frustrating. And so I look forward to representing the new part of 15. I worked hard to make certain that it was a democratic district. And let me just say, you're gonna enjoy the engagement that I use as a state Senator. I know you haven't experienced that in the previous service from your Senator, but you're gonna really get a breath of fresh air of people. I'm meeting with your mayors. I'm meeting with your stakeholders and look forward to being a very engaged state Senate in the new areas of Bellaire and West U. Thank you very much for having us together tonight.

**Neha Madhari (00:09:13):**

Thank you. Thank Senator. And Ms. Cook. We have a very ambitious governor. I think that that is clear. And one of the things that our very ambitious governor and a hot button issue for the, or the, uh, the concept of critical race theory and the governor has recently, um, uh, contemplating or presenting to his Republicans, a, an amendment to the U uh, the state constitution with the parental bill of rights. I'm interested in your thoughts relevant to critical race theory. Um, ha how we address this since it appears to be a non-issue in the public schools, as well as this parental bill of rights, um, Senator let's start with you on that topic

**John Whitmire (00:10:05):**

Please. Sure. Critical race theory's been around for decades, but not until Donald Trump's hard right positions that it became relevant to the political discussion. We fought it very diligently last spring in Austin, we were out-gunned, but Greg Abbot is trying to out Trump, Trump, uh, you saw him in Montgomery county two nights ago. He goes as extreme as he can. I think it's just quite frankly, a diversion from what they're doing to public education. You now see that this bill of rights he wants to put in the constitution is going to allow choice or vouchers. Vouchers would ruin public's education in the state of Texas. It would certainly shut down our rural schools in the urban areas. You do have other options, but in mid-size or small communities, if you allow the students to take their vouchers and go to their church schools, B Brenham for instance, would just lose their independent school district. It is nothing but demagoguery is hard, right to appeal to the Trump core. Uh, Abbot is Abbo trying to outdo Santa in Florida and it's hurting the state of Texas

**Neha Madhani (00:11:19):**

Ms. Cook. Let's give you the opportunity to address this as well as it pertains to this critical race theory, as well as this parental bill of rights that's being contemplated or being pushed by our governor.

**Molly Cook (00:11:32):**

I agree with much of what the Senator said. And, uh, you know, he has criticized governor Abbot for running for president, and how has changed the way that he approaches the issues. And, um, it, I am concerned about the Senator running for mayor and how that will, that will change his approach to issues. Uh, C R T is, is talking about that as a distraction from the ongoing siphoning of resources in local control from public school districts, the focus of the ledge should be on funding, public school, equitably protecting the rights of all children to play, getting kids insured. We rank last for child insurance rates, improving maternal health

outcomes, protecting school children from environmental hazards, like unclean air from nearby freeways and supporting, not punishing local ISDs.

**Neha Madhani (00:12:15):**

Thank you, Senator, would you, uh, just to follow up on what Ms. Cook said, is there anything else that you would like to add in regards to

**John Whitmire (00:12:21):**

No, I, I just think that we have to not fall into the, to the trap that they used in Virginia to defeat the democratic nominee. We have to make certain that we recognize parents have a role in the participation of the, uh, certainly the school boards and the policies of the independent schools, but it's a hateful message. And, uh, that's the reason elections matter. We've got to make up some ground in Austin and yet everyone we can to register and turn out and vote, because I don't think that represents the general public. In fact, I know it does. They're only appealing to their Republican core base. They get the nomination, then they think the state is read and we're stuck with a bunch of right wing redder that is really harmful. And we'll talk about other issues, the meanness they showed toward the transgender Chi of the state, I can go on and on what they put women through in terms of the six week heartbeat I can go on and on. They are carrying out a mean policy and certainly, uh, we need to hold 'em accountable.

**Neha Madhani (00:13:30):**

Thank you. Thank you so much. Um, Senator Whitmire and um, what you both said, uh, really resonated with me. I'm, I'm actually gonna, um, change topics a little bit, and I wanna talk, um, about crime. Um, the crime rate in Houston is the highest, highest it's been in years. We've just surpassed Chicago. Um, in terms of violent crimes, we've seen the, a proliferation of guns, largely due to gun laws that don't protect the general population. Now we're seeing repeat offenders people out on bond, sometimes multiple bonds committing murders. How do you intend to keep guns out of the hands of these people who by law should not be in possession of a five? And then that's the first part of my question. Second part to you, Senator Whitmire. What kinds of gun related bills do you see coming up in the next legislative session and to Molly? What kinds of gun related bills would you introduce in the next legislative session and Molly, I'll let you go first.

**Molly Cook (00:14:39):**

It's important to be very specific. When we talk about the crime wave, what most people mean when they say that is the rate of murders and violent crime are up while other types of crime, including property crime, which I know a lot of people are concerned about, have decreased.

There are various sometimes competing theories that explain this spike. But one thing is clear. Gun sales have increased where there are more guns, there's more gun violence. Additionally, when we discuss violence and violence prevention, we would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge that intimate partner violence or domestic abuse accounts for 15% of all violent crime. And over two thirds of firearm deaths are suicides. There are people sitting in jail downtown charged with a nonviolent class B and C misdemeanors awaiting trial, simply because they can't pay bail. Meanwhile murders go unsolved. This is about a misalignment of resources and priorities in 2011, Senator Whitmire voted in favor of B 1581, which was concealed carry on college campuses. In 2013, he voted to expand firearm on manufacturing in Texas. And in 2017, voted for S SP 60 to reduce the application fee for a license to carry a handgun. Two important policies that I would back are limiting stranger to stranger sales, which Lieutenant governor Patrick himself says that he even support and universal background checks the NRA and trout grassroots organizing as the reason for their success. We need a new approach to these issues.

**Neha Madhani (00:16:03):**

Thank you, Molly. But I, I would like to say you did not answer my question about how you would keep these firearms out of the hands of these repeat offenders who are out on bond, sometimes multiple bonds. That was my first question.

**Molly Cook (00:16:23):**

I would say limiting stranger to stranger sales and universal background checks would be an excellent place to start that have bipartisan support.

**Neha Madhani (00:16:32):**

Thank you, Senator Whitmire?

**John Whitmire (00:16:35):**

That session I carried legislation for the mother's demanding action, a very effective group, and I share their frustration, the red flag bill, where when someone enters an emergency room or domestic court, or even a criminal court, and they're having an emotional difficulty through a due process system, the court could apprehend their weapons. Uh, we, we tried that twice, certainly after the Santa Fe, uh, disaster tragedy at their school, we did our best in a hearing. And then Patrick, shut it down immediately. What we've got to do is hold people accountable that use weapons in a commission of their crime. Remember I told you, we CLA we must classify people and we have the toughest penal code in the nation, which I sponsored in 93. We also have the best treatment program in the United States, but what we have to do is hold

people accountable. What we've just recently discovered two weeks ago, that bail bondsman or financing the bond for defend 30 seconds.

**John Whitmire (00:17:41):**

We have to put that to stop. I'm already preparing legislation that we'll be able to get to the records of the bail bondsman. And when they finance the bail bond, with the understanding that defendant will go get the rest of the money and bring it back to the bail bondsman, that is a new enterprise of crime, and it's not just in Houston, it's in the unincorporated area and it is very much gonna impact bail air and West U I think we have to have a zero tolerance for anyone that use a weapon in the commission of a crime. I work with former chief Bradford. I talked to chief thinner Saturday afternoon, and I would not hesitate to have the DPS to come in and run an Antiga task force. The juvenile gains are what really are perpetuating most of our crime.

**Neha Madhani (00:18:30):**

I apologize. Um, we'll probably, if we have time at the end, um, we'll, we'll tack on more to this, but before we get to Neha, I must apologize. Ms. Cook, I kept addressing you as Molly and I addressed Senator Whitmire, Senator Whitmire, and I should have said Ms. Cook, and I apologize. So Ms. Cook, um, from here on out, I'm so sorry.

**Neha Madhani (00:18:59):**

All right. Um, my next, my next question will be on, um, Medicaid expansion. Um, what will it take for Texas to pass Medicaid expansion? Although red states around us have passed it, Oklahoma, Missouri recently passed at Louisiana and Arkansas passed it a few years ago. And in my world, as you know, Senator Whitmire, um, this would drastically decrease recidivism rates into, uh, our state in prison because as it stands now, the state prison mental health, um, uh, prison is basically the mental health, um, units are, are basically our safety net for the state of Texas. Um, so what will it take and what, what has, what, why has it, it happened yet? I'll um, ask Senator Whitmire to go first.

**John Whitmire (00:19:47):**

It hasn't happened because of the Republican control of the house in the Senate, in the state leadership, we have made progress. The TMA Texas medical association came out and support last session. And the hospital association is beginning to support the concept. What we have to do is get all the stakeholders to demand that we get Medicaid expansion. It would save taxpayers dollars across Harris county because the people that show up in the emergency rooms of LBJ and Ben top, or that do not have insurance and have no primary care doctor. Now



here's a little bit of hope. The rural medical facilities are having difficulty because of COVID. I've talked to Senator Nichols from east Texas two days ago, he said, he's had four rural hospitals shut down Medicaid expansion would give them the medical practice that they so badly need in their community hospitals, but everyone's gonna have to play a role.

**John Whitmire (00:20:45):**

We're gonna have to speak loud. We're gonna have to make an, an economic issue, main issue with our med center, which we're in the shadow of every institution. There all have powerful legislative delegations and government relations people. We've got to get everybody singing that we've gotta have Medicaid special. The problem is the Republicans in Austin that with Obama, it would cost us nothing. The feds will pay a hundred million over 10 years, but as long as Republicans are demagoguing and tying it to Obamacare, we've got a really tough job to do, but I'm working on it, but we need the medical community to really get in behind us.

**Molly Cook (00:21:28):**

A survey from the Episcopal health foundation found that 69% of Texans want Medicaid expanded. And that's an increase from the same survey a year earlier, but less than half of Texas knew that we were one of only 12 states not to expand Medicaid. There's an education gap there. Texans with low incomes, 82%. Those who say they're in poor health, 82% and uninsured adults under age 65, 80% were among the groups of the highest percentage supporting Medicaid. These folks are my daily patients and I myself by my insurance from the individual marketplace. It's incredibly costly. I get it. Texas doesn't have voter led initiative and referendum, unfortunately, but other states have had success after flipping governorships from red to blue. Arguably the most important thing Senator Whitmire could have done to get us Medicaid expansion. Would've been to donate large amounts of money from his war chest to our statewide candidates like Lupe Valdez in 2018. And now Beto for governor in 2018. He gave none, but between July and December of last year of the senators spent 2.4 million on stocks. We're seeing red electeds and red states change their mind about this. Even governor Kemp from Georgia, people are gaining coverage. Thanks to hard work from people like Senator Johnson, rural and safety net, hospitals are benefiting. This is about reaching people, organizing, telling stories and holding our legislators accountable. We need motivated active leaders and someone who understands the issues.

**Neha Madhani (00:22:54):**

Senator Whitmire. Would you like to reply?

**John Whitmire (00:22:57):**

No, ma'am

**Neha Madhani (00:23:00):**

All right. I, I've got a question Senator. Um, you've got 38 years of, of working with Republicans. I think it's fair to say. The Republican that you are working with today are different from the Republicans that you were working with 30 years ago. It seems to me that before there was an effort for purposes of compromise and today there appears to be no effort at compromise. When you look at SV one, that's passed. When at SBA that's passed we've from the peanut galleries. Don't see it getting better. What do we do in 2023? How do we as Democrats confront these Republicans who are clearly uninterested and compromise

**John Whitmire (00:23:50):**

First, let me state, I, I look forward to coming back as your center and spend a lot of time, lots of time walking you through the process and the transition I've seen occur in Austin. It's been startling. And, and let me just also tell you, there's no indication it's gonna get better. There are five freshmen senators. Next time Patrick is hand picking Larry Taylor's replacement. Jane Nelson, chairman of finance. I can go on and on. Redistricting is not going to improve the general representation of the public and the legislature. Yes. What has happened from my vantage point as a senior member in the Senate is the Republican party has been captured by fringe groups. And I could go through and list a number of 'em same ones that carried out the invasion of our national capital. They're present what I do as Dean of the Senate prior to oh three, it was largely just ceremonial.

**John Whitmire (00:24:49):**

Now I have responsibilities because it's the only caucus that we can bring all 31 Senator together. And talk, let me just give you an example. The COVID social distancing this time last year, we weren't even sure we were gonna be able to meet cause the pandemic. If when I brought 'em all to together to decide, how are we gonna function under COVID conditions? We had several Senator still were saying it was a hoax. So I heard them out. Then we came up with social distancing. We were all tested every day and were very responsible. But I give you that example is that's the element we're working with. They're not Reagan Republicans, they're not George Bush Republicans. They're single shot individuals that win the Republican primary. They go there to carry out a pro-life policy, an NRA policy. They beat up immigrants. They beat up GLBT.

**John Whitmire (00:25:42):**

They're not [unintelligible] seconds. They are not worried about the outcome. It's the next election. All they care about. I take the fight to 'em the experience matter. And let me just, let me just emphasize, we're losing several moderate quote, relatively moderate Republicans. So we've gotta be concerned. How are we gonna turn it around? Organize, organize, and organize. Register to vote. The hit Hispanic proud population has to be more engaged. So we've got to do our part, but, uh, it's alarming. It's alarming and we should be Patrick stands up there in Montgomery county and says the election was stolen. Abbot will say anything. You got Paxton under indictment. They don't represent the majority of T. Right. Thank you, Senator. I wanna come talk to you and do time about the process and how we can we fight 'em we slow 'em down. The democratic senators are smarter, more organized, but we're still outvoted because of the sheer numbers and redistricting did not help us, except I got some great new

**Moderator & timekeeper (00:26:51):**

Thank you. Sohar and the time keeper, just to give you a heads up, I know we didn't kind of walk through it. We've we had one and a half, uh, minutes for each answer we've now, and it to two minutes. I am trying to give you a heads up at 30 seconds to the, um, end goal. So just keep your years open for that. When I say 30 seconds, and please do try and wrap up in the lost 30 seconds. Thank you. I'm sorry. I thank

**John Whitmire (00:27:18):**

You. I'm I'm passionate.

**Neha Madhani (00:27:20):**

Thank you, Senator. And, and Ms. Cook. We, we know that you are very passionate about this issue as well, in regards to what are your thoughts, your plans, your ideas you may have, if you are a fresh face in the Senate for purposes of dealing with these people on the other side of, of the docket, from us relevant to, uh, Republicans and, and what kind of strategy you're, you're putting together in that respect,

**Molly Cook (00:27:51):**

I would ask if maybe a new kind of Republican requires a new kind of fighter. And, um, it's interesting that he points out the Hispanic photos missing because his website is still not in Spanish, but I work in a fast-paced high stakes environment every day. And I don't just with democratic doctors and patients. My job is about earning trust and knowing how to work on teams. A Republican doctor told me just Friday, he'd be willing to tell anyone that I'm a pleasure to work with and compliment in my consummate performance, grassroots organizing, focusing on issues over party, healthcare, broadband schools, state preemption of local control

and transportation are all areas that rural folks and urban folks can probably align with hard work and with care, I even have a bill to stop sacrificing our property tax dollars to corporate developers. That I'd be thrilled to support that Senator Bettancourt bill.

**Molly Cook (00:28:40):**

The opportunity is there. If we choose to do the work, I've had conversations at Texas transportation commission meetings, rural folks, and with Republican folks, and we agree text not can't keep acting the way it does. That's an opportunity for alignment. In 2003, the Senator, um, came, said that he would come back first to, uh, negotiate across the aisle. In 2004 was a sweeping loss for us. In 2015, he said he would use his seniority to keep them from changing the rural. And they immediately changed it from two thirds to three fifths. And in 2021, he stayed behind and even says himself. It was the worst year yet working across the aisle. Can't look like going along to get along. It should look like work and I'm willing to do it. Senator Whit Myers quoted as saying, I try not to bring bills that are time consuming if they aren't going to get that shows that he's not interested in moving the needles. He's interested in protecting political capital. We don't need a backroom dealer. We need someone on the front lines working in the community

**Neha Madhani (00:29:40):**

And Senator let's give you the, um, opportunity to follow up to that. Please

**John Whitmire (00:29:45):**

Let me let, just emphasize. If we're going to fight the Republicans the way we've been fighting them and continue to fight them with their hateful legislation, you've got to have a Senator that's on the key committees. I'm on finance. I fight them for funding for Houston TA U Prairie view, U of H medical school law school. You've got to be in play on the business and commerce committee. If we're ever gonna get weatherization, I make them talk about global warming. I make them talk about, we haven't prepared for the next freeze, which today I even got a bulletin Mert. They're concerned with their freeze. It's gonna be here, the remainder this week, chairing criminal justice. They come to me and I get to talk to talk to Anne Johnson, someone that I know y'all at elect and trust. Who's endorsed me in this race. She had a brilliant idea to have three temporary courts to take care of the back law. She came to my office to help organize the effort to get that passed. You've got to be on the right committees and have the seniority experience that people listen to.

**Neha Madhani (00:30:51):**

Thank you. Thank you so much. Um, you're welcome. Thank you. I'm going to, I'm gonna switch gears a little bit again and, um, and talk about the environment. Although there was something that you said, um, Senator Whitmire that, you know, I wanted to push back on, but I, I wanna get through all of our questions first. Sure. Um, so Houston has, um, Houston's air quality is among the worst in the nation and we have never met federal standards. Forat we understand the negative impacts all this has on health and now, and I, and I know overall in Houston, our air quality is poor, but I'm gonna talk specifically about this district in 15, where we have this interchange of 59 and six, 10 that has now expanded. Um, what are the plans to offset the carbon emissions from the increased traffic that we are gonna have in the middle of this district? That's one question. And then the other question is about CO2 sequestration because, um, you know, Texas infrastructure is right for it. And I know that we've done a little bit, but why have we been so late to the table? Um, and what can we do to do more and well,

**John Whitmire (00:32:20):**

Oh, grant, I'm sorry,

**Neha Madhani (00:32:21):**

Go ahead. You can go first.

**John Whitmire (00:32:23):**

Elections matter. And I, I I'm continue to repeat that. I mean, the TECQ is a board appointed by governor Abbott, before that, Perry, before that, Bush. So when we lost our statewide positions to the Republicans, we really suffered a setback. I have a hundred percent rating by the air Alliance. I'm involved in clean air in terms of preventing the batch plants. It took my seniority to stop a batch plants in the African American committee of Acres Home. We're fighting a landfill currently in Cardale. What we've all got do is first recognize the problem. If we don't acknowledge the problem. And I'm talking to Mayor Friedberg and, and ayor sample, and we're discussing not only clean air, but the infrastructure of drainage. So we've got our work cut out for us. We've got to encourage industry to continue, continue to invest their resources. U of H is doing some outstanding research or carbon recapture. So having this dialogue and going forward into the legislative halls and, and educating folks, but, uh, it's tough when, when you are dealing with the T E C Q the environmental protection agency is showing much more aggression and aggressive discussion under governor Biden, president Biden, but, uh, we've got a lot of work left to do.

**Neha Madhani (00:33:53):**

And Ms. Cook just a second. I, I, I want you to answer the question, but, um, Senator Whitmire you keep saying you're on all these com and that's what it's gonna take, you know, um, your leadership being on these committees, yet, if you run for mayor, we lose all of that. So how, I mean, how is this a,

**John Whitmire (00:34:11):**

Well, first of all, let's let's if you want, if, if you're ready to discuss that, first of all, I was approached by people from Senate district 15 to consider it. I said, no. Then they started talking about the crime issue, infrastructure, other things I said, okay, let's talk to others. We talked to others and it took off the mayor's race is not on the ballot this time. This is the sessions, 23, the mayor's race. The next mayor will be in 24. And I even actually saw someone that may be a candidate for mayor. It's interesting to me that everybody just assumes I'm gonna win. I'm doing nothing different than wanting to go back to Austin and fight with my seniority, finance business industry and criminal justice Dean of that seniority doesn't belong to me by the way, it belongs to you and you ought to use it in 2023 to the betterment of our community. The same model I'm discussing is Sylvia Garcia, who did an outstanding job in the impeachment hearing was the Senator ran for Congress. Rodney Ellis was the Senator went to commissioner's court, Sylvester Turner, Sheila Jackson, Lee Harris was the us Senator for

**Neha Madhani (00:35:25):**[Unitelligible]. No, no

**John Whitmire (00:35:26):**

You go where you can serve.

**Neha Madhani (00:35:30):**

Okay. Thank you. Thank you so much. Now I am going to let Ms. Cook answer the question that I had asked Ms. Cook, do you need me to repeat it or are, are we good?

**Molly Cook (00:35:41):**

I'm ready. Thank you so much. So thank you. We obviously, oh, sorry. Excuse me. We obviously need to decrease car dependence throughout the state and some interesting things that are besides for most folks in Harris county are things like population growth, modeling assumptions from the age TPC, the Houston Galveston area, council transportation policy council. Um, those are very basic assumptions. Things that we can all have an effect on from the state legislature that are flawed things like a catch 22, where you assume horizontal growth. And so you widen more freeways. So then there's more horizontal growth. So you keep widening freeways. We have to address the root causes and assumptions of these issues that are failed and are biased

toward continuing down our car centric paradigm. Additionally, the Senator <laugh> voted, um, to prohibit localities like Denton from banning fraction fact fracking, excuse me, in 2015.

**Molly Cook (00:36:33):**

And, um, has a history of vehicle emissions testing, moratoriums supported raising taxes on electric vehicles. There's, there's a list of issues. Um, additionally, on his, on his, off the cuff interview recently, he says that he wished he struck back at Hancock when he was, um, stopped from talking about climate change. Uh, I would say the same thing. So one thing that we could do is expand SEP supplemental environmental projects to include air quality. Those are missing right now. So even if your, uh, project plants, trees, and, and recapture CO2, it can't serve in as an SEP. We need to conserve prairies and wetlands, which would be good for the environment and good for flooding. And we need penalties for taking out large trees and stopping development in our flood weight as well. Um, there's a lot of opportunity in Houston for cleaning up air quality, but we need a leader who's willing to go toe to toe with Republicans and Ts sec to hold corporate polluters accountable so that no workers' employer is also their neighborhood's worst polluter,

**Neha Madhani (00:37:36):**

Ms. Cook. Um, Senator Whitmire had quite had a bit of extra time to talk about, you know, the environmental questions. So I please you've got more time and I would love to hear more about, um, how you would work with Republicans, um, on some of these issues as they've been so unwilling to budge. Um, so if you could share a little bit more about some of your ideas and how you know, and your strategies to, um, get them to agree with you.

**Molly Cook (00:38:08):**

And I will say, I wholeheartedly agree with the Senator sentiment that the extremist Republican legislature is not representing Texan's real views. So to me, the work and the opportunity there is the people is among shifting power to the people, through community organizing, focusing on issues where people can align rather than parties, where they don't align. I'm thinking about, uh, like I said, conversations about transportation at the TTC meeting. Folks from Austin are mad about 35 folks from San Antonio are mad about Broadway. We're mad about I 45 El Paso's mad is every single Dallas is lucky to have a, a pretty progressive MPO and deputy engineer from text dot, but every city is mad. And so are the people in small towns, text dot wants to build bypasses around their towns, uh, which would decrease sales revenue from folks driving down their main street. So I see real opportunity there to travel the state, to build those coalitions, to beef up the already existing statewide coalition for text dot reform. Right. And I know that that only scratches the surface of issues. Thank you.

**Neha Madhani (00:39:18):**

Thank you. Thank you. I have a question regarding voter engagement. You know, the last legislative session had the worst voter suppression law come out of it. Um, and both of you have talked so much about voter engagement, but how we do that when we have this Jim Crow 2.0, um, and basically, um, decapitating our efforts, what is, how do, how can you, and how will you inspire people to register, to vote, to come out and talk to these campaign to these committees, as both of you have stated, um, Ms. Cook,

**Molly Cook (00:40:03):**

It's organizing, and I have a fantastic record of organizing. People need to feel represented. People need to feel seen and heard people deserve to have their doors knocked on. People deserve to be served and cared for in the language that they prefer. And the ways that they prefer it is up to us as leaders in our communities and up to our elected public servants to stimulate that engagement. The Senator recently is on record is saying that the lack of young, Hispanic voters or labor not being as powerful of working folks missing elections is the reason for poor voter turnout. I would argue that at the buck stops right here, it would be my job and my pleasure to be responsible for voter turnout in the district, and to do everything that I can to support groups, just like the three that are hosting tonight on this call and inspiring their own communities to go out, to advocate for themselves, to make decisions on behalfs of their communi. And I will again, point out that I, by joining this race and doing it right, have already engaged, engaged the voters more in this district than have previously happened for decades. Um, I will also point out that my website is currently in Spanish and we're working on more languages and the senators is still in English. So I am truly, truly committed to community, organizing to civic engagement, to empowering the district and to getting out the vote. Thank you.

**Neha Madhani (00:41:31):**

The, the good news tonight is

**John Whitmire (00:41:32):**

When you listen to me, I have a record and people that have observed Austin legislature for years have made a decision. They've screened us, whether it's labor, whether it's GLBT, Black Democrats of Houston, I can go on and on the major groups that look at voting records and activities in Austin, know the importance of re my returning to Austin based on seniority. In experience, what we have to do is let people know elections matter. These are not a play thing. These are life and death decisions. I'm not on the ballot. Quite frankly, it's everyone that's



participating tonight. We go to Austin together. I like to use an example of fighting a landfill. When you fight a landfill, everyone gets involved. You have a town hall meeting and you just pack an auditorium. You have to make every election like a landfill. And quite frankly, the Republicans are trying to make landfill out of our state capital.

**John Whitmire (00:42:37):**

You have to put a face on elections. You have to talk about healthcare. You have to talk about criminal justice and transportation. We need a regional mobility plan as environmentally sensitive. You can't let people think it's just a popularity contest because it's really needs to be issue oriented. And in involve in, in terms of getting involvement, you've got to build coalitions. You've got to let people not be divided as some would have us. Do. You gotta bring us together and have people register and turn out to vote and let 'em know elections matter and experience counts.

**Neha Madhani (00:43:18):**

We have lots of questions in the chat. So I am going to ask one last question, and then we're gonna get to the, to the chat box. Um, and this is for both of you. Um, and I want you in 60 seconds, um, to tell me, um, Senator Whitmire, you 38 years in Austin.

**John Whitmire (00:43:42):**

Yes. Ma'am

**Neha Madhani (00:43:45):**

Tell me how we in district 15 should have faith in you in you that you will push a democratic agenda and, um, and be our representative, even though you may be considering running for mayor. Tell us why we should put our faith in you—

**John Whitmire (00:44:08):**

Because I told you, I believe public service is a calling. I am dedicated to my job. I have six- and eight-year-old grandchildren. I run government for their future. That's the test I'll put it to. There is no reason to have my experience if you don't use it. We have major challenges. Next session will be worse and meaner than the last one. They have not stopped. They're emboldened, they'll carry forward. They did control redistricting. They've got the courts on their side. I—

**Neha Madhani (00:44:41):**

I, I understand understand, and you you've been there for 38 years. What makes it—

**John Whitmire (00:44:46):**

Because I have a record. You can look at my record accomplish

**Neha Madhani (00:44:49):**

What makes this next year different? Why will it be different if we vote are voting for you?  
What will make it different for us?

**John Whitmire (00:44:56):**

Because I'm going to have bail bond reform. We're gonna help bail bonds have been responsible for the crime that we've got. I chair the committee that will hear that I will be a coalitions with our local officials, Carol Alvarado, who? 15 hour brilliant filibuster, ask her - she's endorsed me. I was there to help her carry out that responsibility. I got the rules changed. They were not loud Senator, but ask her one question. Thank you, six in the morning, I got to ask her more questions

**Neha Madhani (00:45:27):**

And to be fair, I'm now gonna ask Ms. Cook. Um, why should we put our trust in you as this is your first foray into public office? Why the Senate, why not a city position? And then we're gonna go to the questions in the chat.

**Molly Cook (00:45:46):**

Through my work with I 45, I've interacted with the city county, Houston Galveston area council, the state legislature, and even the federal government. The Texas Senate is where I see the greatest need to combat state preemption of local progress. I'm not scared of money and I'm not scared of power.

Additionally, I could not stand by and watch after Senator Whitmire announced his true intentions for 2023.

Experience matters, but you have to ask yourself, what kind of experience do you want your legislator to have? Because I have policy experience and a strong educational background, but I also have the kind of experience you can't buy. I have experienced feeling unheard at public meetings. I've experienced clocking in and out at a job that seems impossible because our state refuses to care for the poor and the unhoused. I've experienced sexual abuse and been harassed by employers, workers I've experienced and felt deeply stigmatized by my abortion. I have experience in building grassroots coalitions and understand the power of an organized and ignited electorate. I am a woman, I get things done, and I'm going to do this work with or

without election, but look at what I have valued and what I have accomplished with no money and no staff. Imagine what I could do, what we could do from the Texas Senate. You should vote for me because I get it. I care. And I'm ready.

**Neha Madhani (00:47:10):**

Thank you. Thank you both. And then Dana, if you'd like to read some of the questions in the chat, I think you're muted. Um, all right. In

**Dana/Moderator: (00:47:28):**

Regards to, um, some of the questions in this respect, we are we're collection of frustrated Democrats as, as you well know. I mean, Ann [Johnson, who represents West U and Bellaire in the Texas House] was a huge win. Um, our previous Senator, obviously, as you had noted, Senator has not been a win for us and, and largely non-responsive. What are your thoughts, both of you in terms of trying to get more Democrats engaged, what you can do in your capacity, either of you as elected for purposes of, of getting more Democrats, we've been hearing forever that we're gonna be turning blue, that we're not a red state, we're a non-voting state. What, what can we do? Or what are your thoughts in this respect?

**John Whitmire (00:48:19):**

I think you do what you're doing tonight and applauding. And certainly your diversity that's represented here is coalition building is going and working hard and letting everyone that elections matter. These are life and death decisions that politicians make. It's not a play thing. It's not a popularity contest, but we have to get young people involved. We have to get minorities involved. We have to continue to double down, fighting the Republicans and letting everyone know that elections matter in 98, I think it was Sheila Jackson. Lee had me Sylvester, who was a state rep, Gean Green, the north side elected officials. We met in 98 and Sheila was concerned. There wasn't a lot of energy in the African American community. And I spoke up and I said, it's, why should they be excited about voting? We're reduced their benefits. We're locking up their men. You've got to let people know elections matter.

**John Whitmire (00:49:18):**

You've gotta give 'em hope. You gotta let 'em know that you're listening to 'em and then you've gotta show 'em that we give 'em results. We don't win battles on the Senate floor. We're out done 18 to 13, but we stay there all night. We challenge they, they were not gonna give the second chance for 17 year olds until starting in 2022. I got up and gave a passionate speech, reminding them that they prayed to a Lord every day, that gives people second chances. They made it retroactive. They had in this voter suppression, the original version, a stranger whole

watcher was gonna be able to videotape individuals voting. I got up and told the seconds you can't do that. These are domestic violence victims that don't want anybody to know where they're living and you're gonna videotape them in their precinct. You've gotta take the fight to 'em and hold 'em accountable. And that will get people to follow you to the polls.

**Neha Madhani (00:50:15):**

Molly, let's talk Ms. Cook. Let's talk about that as well. Um, you, you worked on BETOS campaign. He went to every county, um, he still lost came, came close, still lost. What are your thoughts about getting Democrats engaged, involved to the polls?

**Molly Cook (00:50:34):**

I think a really important shift that needs to happen is around trust in our elected officials. Some of that depends on campaign finance reform, or at least a commitment to ethics and transparency. And we need to be really responsive for when you listen to folks, they can tell when you take their comment and put it in the shredder box and we need to be responsive to them to build that trust. We need to work overtime for the most granular level, the folks who are at the center of this regular, everyday people, working people, young people, whomever it is. And then we need to fight for things like online voter registration. I commend Senator Carol Alverado for her hard work on that. And Senator Whitmire is not listed anywhere as a co-author on that legislation. We need to, um, we need to be willing to fight. We gotta be willing to do whatever it takes. And if that means breaking quorum, that means breaking quorum and not staying behind while they slam through hateful legislation. Um, as I've said already, I'm committed to organizing, I'm committed to building trust and committed to, uh, getting out the vote as we've already demonstrated through our campaign.

**Neha Madhani (00:51:43):**

Um, for both of you, here's a question and thank you. Thank you both. Um, what would you propose as a way to increase the adoption of electric vehicles and SD 15 and throughout Texas?

**John Whitmire (00:51:57):**

I think we have to work with industry and I have been working with CenterPoint. We're actually talking to Buc-ee's about putting some charge stations. Uh, essentially we talked to Buc-ee's about six of his locations. He said, well, when I do it, I want 50.

We've got to get into industry involved. We've gotta make an economic issue and certainly a clean air issue. So it's, it's, I actually am very encouraged about it. Quite frankly, with Tesla coming to Austin, I think it's gonna do a lot to make it part of the conversation in the state of

Texas for electrical vehicles. In fact, I think an electrical truck was gonna be exciting. You can, the Ford truck will allow you to run your house for two hours for two days during a, uh, one of Greg Abbot's freeze out.

**Neha Madhani (00:52:48):**

<laugh> Ms. Cook

**Molly Cook (00:52:51):**

Based on that answer. I am curious why he supported raising taxes on EVs? But, um, while I am supportive of switching from fossil fuels to electric vehicles, we cannot act like EVs are the answer to our transportation problems or to our climate change problems. EVs are still single occupancy vehicles. They still will not reduce traffic and they will not necessarily make us any safer. You still have a person behind the wheel. Um, it's really, really important to emphasize the class disparities and access to environmental and to electric vehicles as well. We have to talk about public transit. So while I am supportive of making it easier for folks to drive EVs around adding charging stations, lowering taxes on EVs and, um, providing incentives for those things, I really don't like to talk about them without talking about public transit and first mile last mile, because that will have a real impact on climate change, a real impact on reducing emissions and also allow us to stop extracting the things that we need to create these batteries that come from other countries. So, uh, I just wanna point out that we really have to shift the paradigm around single occupancy vehicles to make and shape the kind of change we want to see in Texas in a way that's sensitive to those who cannot afford to drive a car. Thank you so much.

**Neha Madhani (00:54:20):**

You're welcome. And I, I wanna go back to the gun violence question that I had asked, um, and particularly Senator Whitmire, because I, um, I, I wanna push back on two things that you said, um, you started off, um, the events saying that, uh, you know, um, you lock up people you're afraid of. To me that's a bit divisive. Um, and I, so I I'm, I'm gonna give you the opportunity to tell me, tell us what you mean by that. And secondly, you talked about, um, anti-gang task task force because it's juvenile that are driving up our crime rate and the gun violence. Um, I'd like to know where you found that. Um, and, um, and why you think it's it's children, um, and why children should be in prison. So be because those just, I don't know if I heard them correctly or incorrectly and they didn't sit well for me.

**John Whitmire (00:55:33):**

Let me, uh, address the children in prisons. When I did the reforms in oh seven of the juvenile justice system, we had 5,000 youth locked up at 10 locations in rural locations in Texas today after reforming that package, it's down to six and I've closed five facilities. Furthermore, we've closed 10 adult prisons in the last 10 years due to my treatment reforms in dealing with mental health, the game task force, uh, DPS task force. How that came about was I got 1.8 million. We have particularly in Southeast Houston, a junior high principal that will tell you his worst problem at Scott junior high is that the gang activity and the fighting and the losing gang comes into the school. So yes, we have to have classification. Uh, I do believe, and it's been the model that other states have watched. Those that you're just mad at.

**John Whitmire (00:56:34):**

We have 300 prostitutes locked up in Gatesville tonight. They shouldn't be locked up. They ought to be in their community, taking life skills courses, getting a G E D going back to work, being United with their family. We need to be locking up the person that is making them a human traffic victim. That's the person that we might be mad at as a community versus the violent offenders we're afraid of. And if you're not afraid of 'em, you should be. And they're getting worse by the day in Houston Harris county, they should be locked up before seconds. So it's kind of the reforms that we've passed in Austin have classification. A DWI offender will kill you, just like a gun will, but if he's not drinking, he's not a danger to you. That person needs to be in treatment. I've forgot a program it's in hinder in Texas, where if you go to prison for a DWI, the third one will get, you locked up for five years. You don't go to the fields. You don't go to work every day. You go to treatment and the recidivism rate is amazing. People can be changed and receive treatment and change their lives.

**Neha Madhani (00:57:40):**

Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Cook. Would you like to say anything with regard to that?

**Molly Cook (00:57:46):**

Sure. Um, I would say that despite bipartisan support and really strong science Senator Whitmire's still quoted as saying, it's not time for raising the age. And I have a big problem with that. Um, a lot of the closures that he's referencing were due to budget shortfall, and he knows as well, all the rest of us, there's an estimated number of 8,000 people in prison in Texas right now for wrongful convictions. So why deny air conditioning? Why, um, talk this way. And, um, you know, I think, I think it's really important to appreciate the shortcomings of our criminal legal system as we're processing through these issues. Thank you.

**Neha Madhani (00:58:29):**

Thank you. There have been quite a few questions about the legalization of marijuana. What is your position? Um, Senator, let's start with you in that respect. Is that an issue for traction for anyone, or is it something that is gonna be being shut down and not addressed by, by, uh, the legislature in 2023,

**John Whitmire (00:58:53):**

The house pass site and release, which quite frankly, is a good program. Dan Patrick received it in the Senate and would not even refer it to a committee. That's the reason the statewide elections are so critical as long as is a Republican majorities in charge and the statewide leadership in place. You're not gonna have the kind of reforms that you are recommending that I think are needed badly. There's no reason not to have sight and release. If you talk to police officers, they essentially do it now, but they're scared because of the video cameras. They're gonna show the prosecutors that they've allowed someone to have contraband and throw it away. So we got a real problem on our hands by not recognizing that one. It's not even being. And number two, uh, we need to clarify that and have progressive legislation,

**Neha Madhani (00:59:49):**

Ms. Cook, have you given any thought to the legalization of marijuana and, and, um, how you would wanna address that if you were elected to Senate?

**Molly Cook (00:59:58):**

Yeah, absolutely. I would fight tooth and nail to, I mean, at least decriminalize, if not fully legalize it. It is needlessly giving people records and punishing is disproportionately black people. And, um, we we've just seen overwhelming evidence. Additionally, I see patients who use all kinds of substances to try to control anxiety or pain, or what have you that are subs, you know, dependence building and, um, can have other consequences. So in, in contrast, cannabis is relatively harmless and non-habit forming. Um, additionally I do believe that some cannabis de uh, decriminalization bills did get referred to criminal justice and did not get hearings. Um, so we can, we can fact check that, but I'm pretty sure. Thank you so much,

**Neha Madhani (01:00:46):**

Senator, would you like to follow up.

**John Whitmire (01:00:48):**

No, he just didn't get referred. It was in Dan Patrick's desk, uh, the last two sessions. And I would suggest he will not have a hearing the next times.

**Neha Madhani (01:00:59):**

Thank you.

**Neha Madhani (01:01:05):**

Why are there now? Do you have any question in the chat? It's like, it's going by so quickly. I'm not able to catch them fast enough. Did I? I did see a question, which I thought was interesting and it was the, the talk about the Texas education association taking over the Houston independent school district. Is that still a, a real possib? Is there something that we should be doing can be doing for purposes of preventing that? What, where does that stand? Senator?

**John Whitmire (01:01:38):**

I think they, uh, lost their nerves. Certainly they planned to do it last year from all indications. I think they decided, and I'm speaking for above, which is dangerous. It would in, there would be an indication that they decided to let the elections make those decisions, which quite frankly, local control is best. They got very involved in school, board races, one several, but I think it largely depends on our new superintendent. I've met with superintendent I'm impressed. I think you have to give him about two years, which he asks for a window to show what he can do. We've gotta make sure he is, got the resources and sports. So I think, uh, the governor and his school commissioner have, uh, decided to take a, a wait and see attitude. I'm more worried about, uh, I'm equally concerned about that, but right now that looks like we've got that in checkmate.

**John Whitmire (01:02:35):**

I'm concerned about the idea of giving the students and families for vouchers that would totally destroy public education. So we've gotta fight that. And there's where we have to cross the aisle and recruit Republican rule and midsize legislators. It would demolish. We have 1,050 school districts. Some of them in, in the north Texas have as few as 60 students. If you allowed half of that student body to go to the local church charter school, you wouldn't have a, you wouldn't have a public school system. It would harm H I S D but we've gotta get the smaller communities engaged for seconds. Yes, that's fine.

**Neha Madhani (01:03:14):**

Miss Ms. Cook. What, what about the school voucher program? And because that is a wedge issue and that isn't issue that, that the Republican party seems to be pushing. What are your thoughts in that respect?



**Molly Cook (01:03:24):**

Actually, the Senator and I completely agree on all of this and, uh, we definitely need local control and not a takeover. You know, we elect the folks that make these decisions for us, and I'm a big believer in bottom up planning. So a takeover would be the exact opposite of that. I am holding an agreement.

**Neha Madhani (01:03:42):**

I have a question from the chat for both of you. Um, we all want criminal justice reform. At least we hope for-profit prisons are staying on Texas. What are your thoughts on corporations making money off of locking people up. Ms. Cook, would you like to go first?

**Molly Cook (01:04:01):**

No one should ever profit off of another person's suffering, whether it's healthcare or it's incarceration, it is absolutely wrong that anybody should profit. And I will point out that as the chair of the CJ committee, Senator Whitmire, between 2013 and 2016, accepted \$25,000 in campaign contributions from private prisons, some which are still associated with incarcerating folks at the border. So I am fully committed to remaining transparent, to upholding ethics of campaign contributions and campaign finance so that I can actually represent the will of the people and work against for-profit prisons. I promise never to accept a dime from a for-profit prison.

**Neha Madhani (01:04:47):**

Thank you.

**John Whitmire (01:04:48):**

The private prison industry is disappearing at the state level. They are now into mostly immigrant detention facilities. Unfortunately that's a whole new industry. The state of Texas turned to private prisons in 90. When people were serving one month for every year that they were sentenced, they were able to build quicker metallic buildings getting going. The ones that still exist are largely treatment facilities, and they can provide some psychiatric and emotional assistance that the state has been unwilling to do. So it's a very small component of the hundred six prisons that the state operates, but, uh, they did have a service, uh, of providing the treatment mode that we needed in our prisons.

**Neha Madhani (01:05:40):**

Okay.

**Neha Madhani (01:05:41):**

Right. I'm sorry. I I'm just, uh, I was muted. I just wanted to ask a question to follow up on that. You said they served more as a treatment facility, Senator?

**John Whitmire (01:05:53):**

Yes. The operation, the operation. They, they give the, the specialized care that the addicted, uh, inmates need this in the emotional treatment. When you get in rural Texas, you do not have these professional care that you need for a lot of the mental health services. So the private sector was able to provide the nurses and nurse practitioners in rural Texas. Unfortunately we built all the prisons and in all the wrong places, Dallas, Houston Santon provides most of the inmates, but in the eighties and nineties, when we went into expansion mode.

**Neha Madhani (01:06:34):**

So, so lemme just ask you then Ms. Cook said that she would not take a dime a penny from a, for-profit—

**John Whitmire (01:06:41):**

I haven't, I haven't taken and I don't monitor it. It, but I haven't taken contribution from the private industry since the dates that she mentioned. I, uh, her, obviously her opposition research is <laugh> is getting her information that I haven't kept up with. Cause it's not relevant. We're not taking those contributions now, nor are we taking NRA money. And when the Republican party went so far hard, right. We just said, enoughs enough. And we do not receive those contributions or ratings

**Neha Madhani (01:07:13):**

That you are not aware of.

**John Whitmire (01:07:16):**

No, I don't now.

**Neha Madhani (01:07:19):**

Okay. Um, Dana, more questions?

**Neha Madhani (01:07:24):**

No, I think this is a good time to wrap up. Uh, thank you so much, both the view, Senator Whitmire, Ms. Cook for an invigorating enlightening evening. Sure. Um, like to give you guys just a, a minute or so to wrap up for your closing comments, um, Ms. Cook,

**Molly Cook (01:07:41):**

I'll just say one more time. Experience does matter, but what kind of experience do you want your legislator to have? I'm Molly cook. I'm a, and a community organizer born and raised in the Houston area. Excited to serve the full term with my focus wholly on the district and spend all four years. Even the time leading up to the general engaging folks and turning out the vote. Thank you so much for a really wonderful evening to all three hosts tonight. You guys are amazing. Thank you for the, that you do. It's been a real pleasure to be on.

**Neha Madhani (01:08:15):**

Senator Whitmire

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**John Whitmire (01:08:17):**

Yes. And thank you for abs. And it's been very informative and I hope this, the energy that we're looking forward to get people to turn out the 2023 session will be probably the most important and recent times if we don't get the crime surge under control, not only in Houston, but across the state, probably a lot of what we talked about. Doesn't matter if people do not feel safe and, and, and totally reform bail bond do away with cash bonds because the violent offenders can still come up with the cash, do away with the financing of bail bond by bail bond operators. But more importantly, or equally important is the funding of the finance committee. We're gonna get lower large numbers of dollars, billions in COVID and infrastructure money. If we don't take some of that infrastructure money and come into Houston Harris county and deal with the flooding and infrastructure, then we're gonna continue to be on edge.

**John Whitmire (01:09:10):**

Like most of us were today when the forecast of up to six inches. So I wanna be at the table. Experience does matter contacts matter, networking matters and coalition building. So with that, it's a very clear choice. It's your seniority that I, it's only my name. That is your seniority that will give you a seat at the table at the finance business and industry dealing with weather is a supply. And then for certain to continue criminal justice reform, we've done great things in criminal justice reform, but we've got more work to do, particularly as it relates to women in prison. I came up with the Bambi program to allow women to keep and maintain their babies. After they've gone to prison present, we've got where women are raising their children inside TDCJ. One of the more prouder moments of my career.

**Neha Madhani** ([01:10:06](#)):

Thank you so much. Take care.

**John Whitmire** ([01:10:08](#)):

Thank y'all be safe.

[A few people spoke over each other at the end, mostly various people saying thank you and goodbye. I've removed that word salad for clarity's sake.]